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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a new emphasis on home-based parental involvement, one that takes a realistic approach to the roles accessible to parents of low-achieving children, given potential limitations on their skills and time. This approach is based on encouraging parents to use everyday activities in the home to develop in their children behavior and attitudes that promote academic achievement in school. This approach differs from that endorsed in past legislation for low-income parents of children served by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The paper begins with a discussion of the role of the federal government in parental involvement. Then it describes the characteristics of low achievers over which parents can exert influence and which research shows can affect student achievement. The next section considers what schools and communities could do to foster a realistic approach to parent involvement, including the teaching of fundamental values consistent with those that children learn at home. The following steps are suggested: (1) informing parents of the specific instructional objectives for the child; (2) reporting to the parents on each child's program; (3) providing materials and suggestions to parents to help them promote the education of their children at home; and (4) consulting with parents about how the school can work with them to achieve the program's objectives. A list of references is appended. (PS)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES:
A NEW EMPHASIS ON TRADITIONAL PARENT ROLES

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES: A NEW
EMPHASIS ON TRADITIONAL PARENT ROLES

Introduction

Research has consistently shown family background to be among the most important influences predicting a child's performance in school (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972; Mosteller & Moynihan, 1972). More recent studies have begun to identify the family attitudes and behaviors that mediate these effects (Walberg, 1984,; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1985; Etzioni, 1984). Yet despite the increased knowledge about the importance of the home environment, only a few examples exist of intervention strategies that have succeeded in altering this environment in ways that promote a child's educational development.

This paper proposes a new emphasis on home-based parental involvement, one that takes a realistic approach to the roles accessible to parents of low-achieving children, given potential limitations' on their skills and time. This approach is based on encouraging parents to use everyday activities in the home to develop in their children behavior and attitudes that promote academic achievement in school. These approaches are available to, and have effectively used by all types of parents. This approach differs from that endorsed in past legislation for parents of Title I children.

The Title I program targeted supplemental services on educationally low-performers who resided in low-income areas, in part because these children were considered less likely to have the same educational opportunities at home as other children. This deficit model of the home reflects the origins of the compensatory education program during the "War on Poverty" period in the mid-1960s. Now known as Chapter I of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, the program retains its original purpose.

While Title I largely ignored the natural role of parents as their children's mentor and guardian in the home, it stressed a major role for parents in the school. This school role was more the result of evolving events than of particular provisions in the original legislation. Indeed, the 1965 legislation that spawned Title I simply required parents to generally be "involved" in developing local projects applications.

Initial evaluations of learning gains of compensatory education participants were quite disappointing. However, investigations by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund

(1969) found that recipient schools and districts abuse of the use of compensatory education program could be identified. It was reported, instead, that Federal money flowed for peripheral expenditures such as band uniforms, swimming pools, carpeting principal's offices and building construction.

The extensive abuses of legislative intent led to tighter Federal legislation and regulations that included expanded parental oversight. In 1971, Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) were legislated at the district level. In 1974, the law was changed to require councils at the school level as well, with members of all councils to be selected by parents. Then, in 1978, the legislation specified that "...each local educational agency shall give each advisory council which it establishes. . responsibility for advising it, in planning for, and implementation and evaluation of its programs and projects assisted under this title" Section 125(b), (P.L. 95-561).

Parental oversight, however, was not limited to ensuring only that compensatory education services reached the intended beneficiaries. It also meant that some parent groups were given oversight approval of the curriculum and the budget itself. In 1979, the Systems Development Corporation (Melaragno, Lyons, & Sparks, 1981) found that 60 percent of the district-level committees reviewed or signed off on all or part of the budget.

As parent committees became established, funds were also set aside to pay parents for their time and to finance expenses and trips for parent group meetings. The 1976 study of Title I by the National Institute of Education (NIE) identified assistance to parent groups as the largest single support service expense, outweighing expenses for food, nutrition, health or counseling.

Along with the growth of PACs, the use of parents as aides in the classroom emerged as another type of school-based parent activity. In 1980, case studies at 16 school districts conducting Title I projects, revealed that parent aides were found at 75 percent of the sites (Melaragno et al., 1981).

The duties fulfilled by the parent aides indicated that the most prevalent activities were directly associated with instruction. However, it is not clear that parents of Title I students are most equipped to handle this type of teaching assignment in the school.

The education amendments of 1981 brought about a change in Federal requirements that eliminated the need for local school systems to establish formal advisory councils. This elimination came about as part of general Federal efforts across a number of social programs to return more control over program

decisions to local officials. More recently new Department of Education regulations represent a clarification of policies toward parent involvement. Although these regulations list PACs and other school-based strategies as permissible parent activities, the regulations stress a more traditional home-based role for parents.

While there is a legitimate role for school-based activities involving parents, particularly in monitoring compliance with Federal regulations, there are also inherent problems. First, the formation of PACs for a multiplicity of Federal categorical programs, including Title I, is excessively burdensome to school officials. The schools' and districts' solicitation of parental involvement is, at first, time-consuming and then administratively awkward and complex. Even if PACs are successfully begun, the results of parent participation in PACs are not overwhelming. According to the Sustaining Effects Study, only 14 percent of parents in Title I schools were PAC members (Hinckley, 1979).

Second, Federal requirements for the involvement of PACs in program governance activities such as project planning, implementation, and evaluation place low-income parents in a awkward position. While they may be able to judge whether or not their children are learning in school, they may have difficulty making decisions on specific issues of school operations, such as assessing the adequacy of curriculum. Yet the legislated purpose of PACs is for this type of involvement.

The use of low-income parents as Title I aides is also problematic. These parents, who are most likely to have little or no higher education, are being used for instructional purposes. In 1976, it was found that 24 percent of compensatory education instruction was provided by paraprofessionals, compared with only 4 percent of regular instruction (NIE, 1977). In essence, disadvantaged children are being exposed to teachers with far less education than children in the mainstream curriculum. Yet, disadvantaged children are exactly those students who most need professional attention.

Finally, the formation of PACs for parents of disadvantaged children is segregative. While compensatory students spend no more than one-fifth of their school day in Title I activities, by forming a PAC their parents deal only with this fragment of their education and remain isolated from the goings-on of the total school program. Indeed, Title I parents remain insulated from the major parent-school groups, such as the PTA, who are concerned with overall educational quality. Only through parental participation in groups concerned with whole-school progress will the needs of disadvantaged children be met.

This paper examines parental involvement strategies that emphasize traditional home-based activities. Since the environment of low- and high-achieving students often differs in ways that are important for assessing home-based strategies, we begin with a description of the characteristics of low achievers over which parents can exert influence and which research shows can affect student achievement.

Characteristics of Low Achievers Over Which Parents can Exert Influence

There are many reasons why a student fails to learn in school. Some may have to do with a student's innate abilities. Others may have to do with school inputs, such as the quality of teachers, class size, or course content. On the other hand, some causes of lower student performance are related to characteristics over which parents could exert control. As Iverson and Walberg (1982) note, academic ability and achievement are more closely linked to the measures of some process and intellectual stimulation variables than to parental socioeconomic status indicators, and the process variables are "changeable and...merit constructive efforts to improve them..." (p. 151).

These characteristics over which parents could have some influence and which are effective in promoting learning are the ones that we seek to identify in this section so as to point the way for recommendations on appropriate parental involvement efforts. Four characteristics are considered: student values, behavior in school, use of time, and access to educational resources outside the school.

Student Values

Students' values determine what youngsters believe is important in their life. Hence, values establish priorities and direct student energies. Students who have priorities that emphasize success in school will expend the effort required to learn. For others who focus on more immediate pleasures, school work may take a backseat to other activities. Values are learned and students tend to assume the values of those close to them, and hence, parents and friends have much to do with shaping their values orientation.

A recent study (Hanson & Ginsburg, 1985) underscored the importance of traditional values as a predictor of academic achievement. It identified student, parent, and peer values to be important predictors for academic success. Students' values included belief in the work ethic, taking responsibility for

one's own actions and religious values. Parents' values focused on their general level of encouragement and concern, attributes which encourage responsible behavior in their children. Peers' values emphasized the importance they attached to education, and thus, reinforce a student's own efforts to succeed in school.

Examining 15,000 high school sophomores, this study found that these traditional values, as predictors of academic success as measured by a standardized achievement test, were twice as important as family economic or educational background. Moreover, the greater relative importance of value characteristics held up when the outcome measure was changed to grades in school or to educational improvement between the sophomore and senior years.

Mayeske's (1973) extensive reanalysis of the Coleman report identified three motivational variables as playing a key role in student achievement. These were student and parent educational expectations of students, attitudes toward hard work and responsibility as antecedents of success, and participation in educational supportive activities in the home. Also, parental encouragement for education has been shown by Sewell and Hauser (1972) to have a "net value" of six-tenths of a year of higher education when other factors are controlled. These authors note the importance for higher education attainment of peer expectations, or having friends who plan on attending college.

Freeman (1985) has found that another value variable—religiosity—is important in affecting the extent to which disadvantaged ghetto youths hold a job when they leave school. He notes that religiosity is not just an indicator of who are "good kids", but that at least some part of the impact is causal.

Recent evidence of the influence which traditional values can exert to enable students to overcome barriers to success is offered in a study of Asian refugees to this country (Caplan, 1985). These families come to this country often with few material possessions, little formal education, and not knowing the English language. Investigation of the correlates of their accomplishments attributed much of the academic success of the refugee children to family values brought from Indochina. The three values rated as most important by 95 percent of the Indochinese families were educational achievement, a cohesive family and a belief in hard work. The author concludes that "these data suggest that cultural values and family centered achievement orientations and strategies can determine high levels of educational achievement, even where income and formal education resources are minimal" (p. 50).

Bloom's (1985) study of the most gifted and talented students in our society confirms the importance of parental reinforcement of students' efforts as a factor for even our best students to succeed. Bloom observed that many of the most successful students were not possessed with unique brilliance. Rather, what distinguished them from others was an enormous drive for success and perfection. The author cites parental support as a major source of this drive. Other research (Weiner, 1973) suggests that even for less able students, extra effort can overcome the handicap of low ability.

The importance of values orientation as a predictor of educational success is particularly significant for participants in compensatory education. These are the kinds of characteristics over which all parents, regardless of their education or income, could exert control.

Behavior in School

Students' behavior affects achievement, and is, in turn, affected by parental input. Students who fail to follow instructions, frequently interrupt class, or are in trouble with the law are not likely to possess the self-discipline to meet academic challenges. Recent research supports the link between poor discipline and low academic performance.

Low-achieving (i.e., lowest quartile) high school sophomores are 60 percent more likely to cut class compared with high achievers, 25 percent more likely to be viewed by their friends as troublemakers, and 20 percent more likely to be in trouble with the law.

A study by Myers, Milne, Baker, and Ginsburg (1986) demonstrated that misbehavior among sophomore students had negative effects on their grades as sophomores. Further, misbehavior affected the learning that occurred between sophomore and senior years; this is an important finding in demonstrating that student misbehavior is causally connected to lower achievement. In case studies of low-achieving, poor ghetto children, Clark (1983) observed that "rules for household conduct, when they exist, tend to be nebulous and contradictory or sporadically enforced" (p. 194).

Lack of discipline has consequences that are not limited to the problem student. Learning does not effectively take place in a climate of fear or when there are frequent classroom disruptions. Moreover, it is the disadvantaged student who is the most likely victim. For example, Blacks and Hispanics were more than twice as likely as Whites to be the victims of serious assaults at school (NIE, 1978). Equal opportunity for minorities should include the right to attend orderly schools.

Thus, parents and students have good reason in judging school discipline as a major problem confronting our schools. In 16 of the last 17 Gallup Opinion Polls (Gallup, 1985), parents ranked lack of school discipline as their number one problem. When Goodlad (1982) surveyed junior and senior high school students as to their "one biggest problem," student misbehavior was listed number one by junior high school students, and alcohol and drug use—a related problem— was rated first by high school seniors.

Research has connected a student's lack of discipline problems with the values described above, and with parents' influence on these values. Hanson and Ginsburg (1985) found that students are less likely to be a discipline problem if they hold positive values related to personal responsibility, religion, and high educational expectations, if their parents are concerned and monitor their behavior, and if they choose friends who value education. Thus, promoting positive values in children is also an important strategy for controlling misbehavior.

It is a strategy open to all parents. Earlier researchers (e.g., Cloward & Ohlin, 1960) suggested that the poor socialization and academic deficiencies brought to school by lower-class students made them more prone to fail in school and then to become behavior problems. Later research (Polk & Halferty, 1966) found surprisingly little class difference in the backgrounds of delinquents and non-delinquents. Coleman (et al., 1982) notes that "the family structure and authority has clearly weakened in recent years...there appears to be a reduced interest on the part of parents in regarding their adolescent children as full members of their family subject to their attention and authority, and a reduced willingness on the part of adolescents to being subject to family constraints and obligations" (p. 190). Parents can take active measures to reverse this trend.

Students Use of Their Out-of-School Time

One of the robust findings of the school effectiveness literature is that the amount learned is related to the time classrooms devote to instruction and that substantial differences in learning time take place among schools and classrooms. Analogously, the amount students learn can be related to their effective use of time out-of-school.

As early as 1967, Rankin found when comparing high-achieving students and low-achieving students that particular parental behaviors at home and in connection with the school differ significantly between these groups. Parents of high-achieving students initiate more contact with their children's school, provide a wider variety of experiences for their

children, and engage in activities encouraging achievement such as helping with homework and talking about school. These characteristics of successful families have been documented by others (Smith, 1968; Clark, 1984; Walberg, 1984) in both single- and two-parent homes and in poor- and middle-class families whose children do well in school.

It seems likely that parents can help their children's academic success through exercising control over their leisure time by curbing television viewing and encouraging homework, reading and conversation.

Television. Television viewing is not necessarily detrimental to learning. Younger children learn vocabulary and, depending on the programs watched, students can learn about the surrounding world. Problems occur when television watching becomes excessive so that television becomes the primary source of out-of-school knowledge and interferes with more productive uses of time. In view of this, it is disturbing that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; Department of Education, 1985) found that a full quarter of 9-year-olds watch more than 6 hours of television per day. In general, television viewing in excess of two hours a day is considered detrimental to school performance. Data from the Sustaining Effects Survey (SES) of 12,000 nationally representative elementary school students, grades 1 through 6, demonstrate that elementary school children who watched four or more hours of TV per day had an 80 percent greater chance of falling into the lowest rather than the highest quartile of reading achievement.

Television fosters a learning process built around rapid but brief presentations of information rather than sustained concentration on material required for an in-depth understanding of topics. At the preschool level, Elkind (1986) suggests that "the rapid presentation of material" on programs such as "Sesame Street" and the "Electric Company" is much too fast for the information processing abilities of young children. These programs, he proposes, "have amplified the attention limitations of young children," with negative consequences for their reading abilities in later life. Similarly, Postman (1986) observes that TV, with its emphasis on visual scenes to provide information with frequent commercial interruptions, discourages development of sustained and critical thinking skills.

Reading. Reading is basic to all learning. It is also a subject that is easily practiced at home. The Department of Education's recent report, Becoming a Nation of Readers (NIE, 1985) emphasized the importance of leisure reading. For example, their study of fifth graders found that 50 percent read books for an average of only four minutes a day, but devoted 130 minutes to viewing television. Reading at home

works to improve reading achievement scores. To illustrate, an analysis of 12,000 nationally representative elementary school students in the SES study (Milne, Meyers, Rosenthal, & Ginsburg, in press) estimated that an hour of reading at home each day would increase reading achievement scores by about one-fifth standard deviation (up to 6 percentile points), after controlling for family structure and economic and educational variables.

Becoming a Nation of Readers speaks directly to children and parents recommending that:

- o Children should spend time in independent reading. Independent reading, whether in school or out of school, is associated with gains in reading achievement. By the time they are in the third or fourth grade, children should read independently a minimum of two hours per week. Children's reading should include classic and modern works of fiction and nonfiction that represent the core of our cultural heritage.
- o Parents should support school-aged children's continued growth as readers. Parents of children who become successful readers monitor their children's progress in school...buy their children books or take them to libraries, encourage reading as a free time activity, and place reasonable limits on such activities as TV viewing.

Hewison and Tizard (1980) found that children of working-class parents who listened to their children read at home had significantly higher reading performance at ages 7 and 8 than children whose parents did not listen to them read. Following up on this research, Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison (1982) found significantly greater gains in reading performance for children ages 6 and 7 whose parents listened to them read at home daily compared with a group receiving extra tutoring in school and with a non-intervention control group. This effect was observed for all ability levels of reading.

Homework. Homework provides students with extra studying. The U.S. Education Department's What Works (1986) concludes that when low-ability students do 1 to 3 hours of homework a week, their grades are usually as high as those of average-ability students who do homework. Similarly, when average-ability students do 3 to 5 hours of homework, their grades usually equal those of high-ability students who do no homework. Further, Walberg (1984) estimates that homework that is graded and commented upon can have three times the effect that socioeconomic status has on learning. Homework that is

merely assigned can have an effect on learning comparable to socioeconomic status.

However, time spent doing homework is a complex variable to understand. First, simply giving students homework is not nearly as valuable as when it is accompanied by feedback from the teacher (Walberg, 1984). Also, less able students may spend more time doing homework because they have greater difficulty doing the assignment.

Conversing. Parents taking an interest in their child's activities and talking about them seems to be an important factor in enhancing student achievement for both high and low achievers. Indeed, research focusing on National Merit Scholars showed they all shared only one common characteristic—almost every evening at dinner with their parents, they discussed world events. Clark's (1983) study of low achievers' homes observed that parents found time for television, "but seldom hold family dialogues, except during arguments" (p. 195).

Building on the findings of Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985), What Works (1986) ties reading with conversing. "Reading instruction builds on conversational skills. To succeed at reading, children need a basic vocabulary, some knowledge of the world around them, and the ability to talk about what they know. Conversing with children about the world around them will help them reflect on past experiences and on what they will see, do, and read about in the future" (p. 15).

It appears that such family routines as regularly scheduled meals provide opportunities for family interactions and discussions that promote learning. Benson, Medrich, and Buckley (1980) note that family members eating together seems to enhance achievement for students from low socioeconomic status families.

Resources That Can Promote Education

One of the deficits historically perceived as being associated with need for compensatory services is a lack of resources in the home. These resources include both human and material inputs that could promote learning. While some resources may not be available to families of compensatory education students, research has shown that academic achievement is related to other resources that are available to all families.

Books in the home. A number of studies have shown the importance to achievement of having books and other reading materials in the home. The Reading Report Card (NIE, 1985) notes that "relationships between available reading materials

and reading proficiency are as notable as those for level of parental education" (p. 50). Other studies (e.g., Milne et al., in press) have shown that, for nationally representative samples of elementary and high school students, reading and mathematics achievement are both related to the number of books in the home. For example, an elementary student in whose home there are no books at his/her reading level is 15 times more likely to be in the lowest quartile than in the highest-achieving quartile; conversely, a child with 50 or more such books is 5 times more likely to be in the highest-achieving than in the lowest-achieving quartile.

Libraries and museums. Access to libraries and museums can also support achievement. As Heyns (1978) found, both proximity to, and regular use of, a library were correlates of summer learning or achievement. Both variables were to some extent proxies for number of books read or time spent reading (and effects therefore diminished when such controls were exercised). However, Heyns found distance to library from home related to number of books read, thus indicating that access to a library exerts an independent influence over reading. Thus, while we have no information on the trade-offs between books in the home, and books from the library, both clearly can contribute to achievement.

Benson et al. (1980) also note that family visits to area cultural centers (museums, aquariums, etc.) are correlated with achievement across sixth graders. However, the achievement of lower income children did not benefit from such visits.

A place to study. The high achievement of Japanese children has been largely attributed to their parents' intervention in stimulating and encouraging the child to learn at home (Sava, 1985). One of the most important practices of Japanese parents is to create a learning atmosphere. For example, home-study desks are purchased when children are very young (3 to 5 years old). All models of these desks have a high front and sides that minimize distractions. There is a built-in study light, shelves, a clock, electric pencil sharpener, and calculator.

Studies in the U.S. have recognized the importance of providing children with a place to study. Smith (1968) reports greater achievement gains among elementary school children whose parents employed methods such as providing a time and place at home for the completion of homework.

Parents as educational resources. The usefulness of parents as educational resources for their children depends in part on parent attributes and characteristics, not all of which are subject to manipulation nor available to parents of disadvantaged students. It is for this reason that we suggest

that, for this target group, parent activities in direct educational instruction with their children should not be emphasized as the sole or even primary method of parental involvement.

There is a wealth of literature on the relationship between family socioeconomic status—particularly income and education—and student achievement (e.g., Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks et al., 1972). The recent challenge for researchers has been to determine how these effects are mediated—through which parental actions on family processes the effect takes place. In particular, authors dealing with human capital development (e.g., Leibowitz, 1974, 1977; Goldberg, 1977) point out that there are a number of mechanisms through which these family demographic variables affect educational outcomes. One is inheritance of intellectual ability, not a manipulable characteristic. A second may be the absence of a father, which reduces material and human resource availability. A third is through the greater efficiency of the better educated mother as a teacher of her children (Goldberg, 1977), affected in part by the fact that mothers spend four times as much time with children as do fathers (Leibowitz, 1974). These are all mechanisms which would appear to be primarily available to parents of higher socioeconomic status.

However, as many authors have noted (Walberg, 1984, 1981; Bradley & Caldwell, 1977; Hanson & Ginsburg, 1985) these family socioeconomic and structure variables can often be shown to account for less of the variance in school achievement than family process or environmental variables. Henderson (1981) cites the various reanalyses of the Coleman data as supporting a "subtle but compelling argument for parent involvement." Less subtle and more compelling are the numerous studies cited in previous sections of this paper supporting the fact that there are behaviors available to all parents that can make meaningful contributions to educational achievement. These behaviors involve parents' time use, parents' monitoring of their childrens' time use, and parental inculcation of values.

How the School Can Help

What used to be considered as basic obligations that parents had to fulfill in order for their child to develop and be educated—the teaching of values, respect for authority, etc.—can no longer be taken for granted. As James Coleman noted in his 1985 Ryerson lecture at the University of Chicago, "Traditionally, the school has needed the support and sustenance provided by the family, in its task of educating children. Increasingly, the family itself needs support and sustenance from the school—and through the school, from the other

families with children in the school--in its task of raising children."

The underlying reasons for the weakening of family support mechanisms are fairly apparent. First, Coleman has suggested that parents have less self-interest in investing the personal time and financial resources to promote their children's development. Children are less important as both parents have become more career oriented, work longer before having a family, and are less dependent upon children for financial support after retirement. Second, the rise in one-parent families and the related increase in proportion of children from families in poverty mean less home resources to invest in children. Third, the dominance of television as a leisure pastime has eroded traditional parent-child contact through conversation and other family activities. While parents remain their child's first and primary educator, this role has largely been ignored by professional educators.

Coleman (1985), who recognizes this problem, proposes to "use the schools to strengthen the family's capacity to raise its children; in the ghetto and the suburbs, it implies active involvement of the school in helping to strengthen the norms that parents hold for their children..." (p. 22). Schools should also take initiatives to help parents support their child's educational development at home.

The schools have been quick to blame parents for failure; U.S. teachers say the biggest problem facing the schools is "parent lack of interest and support" (Gallup, 1984). Nevertheless, the schools have not done their part to reach out and help those parents who want to become involved. Dorothy Rich (1985), based on her extensive experience in home-school development programs, describes what she terms "a teacher's pitfall." The common complaints from parents are: "Teachers don't listen to us." "They feel we have nothing to offer." "They don't respect us." (p. 14). In essence, teachers and school officials will need prodding and help if parent involvement is to be successful.

This section considers what schools and communities could do to foster a realistic approach to parent involvement.

Teaching Values

Today, the teaching of fundamental values--honesty, integrity, responsibility, and the work ethic--in the public schools is controversial. Foes argue that in our modern technological and pluralistic society, the idea that absolute standards of conduct can guide behavior is an anachronism. They believe that the only supportable curriculum in today's modern world seems to be a value-free curriculum. The aim of

this educational philosophy is to adapt to the different viewpoints embedded in our pluralistic society by creating a pedagogy in which all values are personal and relative.

This approach is not succeeding in its lofty aims of improving our understanding of and ability to deal with complex social issues. The basic premises on which it is built are flawed—that education should be value-free; that students are able to evolve their own concepts of right and wrong without adult guidance; that a value-free education is unbiased in its presentation of issues; and, that this form of instruction promotes higher-order thinking and reasoning.

The stark truth is that the transmission of cultural values by our schools has historically characterized American education. From the 19th century McGuffey's Readers to the 1948 NEA handbook, children have been taught to read and write through poems and rhymes, riddles and essays that stress personal and civic virtues. As Honig (1985) noted in his recent book Last Chance for Our Children, "...these texts were on to something—the power of stories to edify as they entertain..." (p. 10).

The public schools can provide that help again. As Honig noted, "Indeed, that may be their unique and essential purpose in the United States—to bind together a diverse and pluralistic society by disseminating the guiding morality that inheres in our best literature and history" (p. 107).

Recent surveys indicate that the American public recognizes that the teaching of fundamental American values belongs as an integral part of a normal education curriculum. When questioned by the 16th Annual Gallup Poll (1984) of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public School on the goal of education, the highest rated response next to "speaking and writing correctly," was "to develop standards of what is 'right' and 'wrong'." An earlier Gallup Poll (1983) revealed that 79 percent of Americans favor public school instruction that deals with ethical and moral behavior; among parents of public school students, 84 percent favored the teaching of values in their children's schools.

The school's need to respond to this is imperative. They need to bring a message to their students that is consistent with the values they learn in the home—respect for authority, the virtue of hard work and the worth of self-discipline.

And this does not mean that schools need to create a course entitled "Values Education." Rather, schools must teach in the classroom values through stories and studies in history, literature and civics. Schools can undertake policies, such as they recently adopted by the California system, to teach the

classics. There the ideals of civilization can best be illustrated.

What's Expected of Students

Along with teaching students about the importance of basic values related to standards of conduct or ideals, schools must put these values into practice. Students must know what's expected of them and they must be held responsible for their behavior. Moreover, parents need to know what schools expect of their children so that they can reinforce these expectations at home.

Codes of school conduct are not a novel idea, but they have in recent years become more of a legal document to protect a school system and its employees against law suits instead of a simple statement of the schools' expectations for its students. For example, the Boston Safe Schools Commission (1983), established to reduce high rates of violence and disruption, concluded "there must be a greater clarity in Boston about what behavior is expected. The intent of the present Code of Discipline has not been well enough understood or communicated, in large part because it is too lengthy and technical in its language" (p. 17).

In addition, codes of school conduct should be comprehensive in scope and cover expectations regarding academic as well as disciplinary conduct. It's not sufficient that a student simply show up at school and not cause trouble to pass. Students and their parents need to know that they are expected to work hard at their academics. Past pressures for social promotions in schools have discouraged clear communication of academic expectations.

An acceptable statement of a school's expectations for its students should, therefore, have at least the following four characteristics: (1) clear statements of what is expected written in simple but specific language; (2) rules of conduct covering such behaviors as attendance, classroom conduct, drug use, and assaults and thefts; (3) expected academic conduct covering such activities as average amount of homework, completion of assignments, and amount of outside reading; (4) definite and consistently enforced penalties for misconduct.

A statement of expectations for students is of little help to parents if they are unaware of such statements. Unfortunately, studies show that a majority of parents are unaware of the nature of such statements. Schools not only must make efforts to ensure that parents receive statements about school policies but that these statements are read. Some schools, such as in Buffalo, New York, have had greater success in achieving parental awareness through requiring students to

return a signed parental pledge that they, as parents, will reinforce at home, the schools' expectations for student academic and discipline behavior.

What's Expected of Parents

Home-based parent involvement strategies must be realistic in what they set out to accomplish. They should establish a set of roles that a responsible parent will carry out. These are responsibilities that focus on attitudes and behaviors. Some potentially worthy activities, especially those involving direct parent-child instruction, are simply not ones that we could expect most parents to undertake. Too few parents are willing or have the time required and, beyond the early elementary grades, many parents may not have the knowledge.

We previously identified a list of parent responsibilities in the home that we propose schools emphasize. They are supported by research and are akin to the activities that a parent would normally carry out in fulfilling their duties as their child's guardian. Examples included instilling children with a sense of worth and importance of accomplishment, promoting good discipline, and monitoring their child's use of time.

Schools can provide specific guidance as to what parents should do in each area through four types of strategies. One is to establish a set of specific everyday activities for parents to do to reinforce their children's learning. The list would include ensuring completion of homework, conversing about school activities, limiting a child's television viewing, or encouraging the reading of books, activities which all parents can manage and which research has demonstrated proves effective. Having the parent sign homework and keep a daily checklist of their accomplishments in other activity areas represents a simple mechanism by which many schools foster home-based involvement.

The Jacksonville school district implements an "everyday" activities strategy. At the beginning of the school year a "back-to-school-night" is hosted by the district. Parents are given an orientation where they are told of their responsibilities and where they receive a year-long calendar marked with major school and district events. In addition to these events, the district marks suggested activities to do with the child. The calendar is grade-specific, based on the age of the parent's child and the activities are coordinated with the curriculum. For example, if the child is studying nutrition, then the parent is encouraged to take the child to the grocery store to study nutritional labels on the groceries.

For the summer months, the American Federation of Teachers has prepared a summer calendar for parents. Each day on the calendar suggests an activity that parents can do with their children to supplement their schooling.

Parents will also need encouragement to get involved. Many parents, especially those who lack substantial schooling, may find the school a frightening place. Others haven't realized the importance. Honig (1985) reports on some Oakland public schools that increased attendance at parents back-to-school night primarily by running "parent participation programs like a political campaign. In English class, students wrote invitations to parents asking them to attend. Teachers manned the contests. Contests were held pitting one class against another, with each one having the highest parental attendance rates earning ice cream sundaes" (p. 168). The result was that parent attendance at back-to-school night increased from 15 to 45 percent. To boost attendance at parent-teacher conferences, volunteer parents called up those who initially failed to attend. Attendance jumped to 65 percent. To maintain lines of communication, teachers sent home weekly progress reports with their children's work that parents had to sign.

Parents may also need help. Teacher homework hotlines (Fairfax County, Virginia; Indianapolis, Indiana) in which teachers are available to answer phone questions respond to an immediate need for information. However, a more basic and continuing need for assistance is suggested in Joyce Epstein's surveys of first-, third- and fifth-grade parents and teachers in Maryland school districts. Four-fifths of the parents said that they could spend more time "helping their children at home if they were shown how to do specific learning activities." Further, the study showed that teachers can be effective. Parents of students whose teachers emphasized parent involvement were more likely to feel they should help their children and to receive most of their ideas for home involvement with teachers. Dorothy Rich has developed and successfully tested an extensive set of ideas to assist parents in helping their children at home through everyday activities.

While parent contact with the school is too often associated with negative experiences—your child is in trouble, please come to school—parents must accept their share of responsibility for their children's improper conduct or failure to otherwise meet their obligations. Some districts are requiring parent attendance at school as a condition for reinstatement from expulsion. In the case of controlling student drug use, Anne Arundel County has found remarkably effective a policy that requires parents to come to school to co-sign an anti-drug use pledge with their child and to co-participate in a drug counseling program.

Conclusions

While the role of the Federal government in parental involvement has changed, over the years policy makers have not backed away from their belief in the importance of parents in educating their children. Secretary Bennett has made parental involvement one of his major priorities, and the Department of Education is providing leadership, supporting research, disseminating findings, and working through such Federal programs as Chapter 1 and Title VII by issuing parent involvement regulations.

While the regulations deal in part with the more traditional activities of school districts related to parents--notification of a child's selection, establishing parent advisory councils, etc.-- they also speak to other practices. Thus, it is pointed out that school districts may want to consider supporting parents by:

- o informing parents of the specific instructional objectives for the child;
- o reporting to the parents on each child's program;
- o providing materials and suggestions to parents to help them promote the education of their children at home; and
- o consulting with parents about how the school can work with parents to achieve the program's objectives.

In a recent speech before the Annual Meeting of Networking Community-Based Services, Secretary Bennett stated, "Above all, I think it is now the job of the Federal government to help recreate the social and cultural fabric that used to give families support in raising children."

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